

### The Nāṭyaśāstra and the Abhinavabhāratī

I wish to discuss below of the principles connected with the interpretation of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* ascribed to Bharatamuni.\*

The present text of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (*NS.*) existed, according to some authorities as early as the 300 A.C. (P. V. Kane, Introduction to the *Sāhityadarpaṇa* p. xi; cf. A. B. Keith, *Skt. Drama*, p. 294). This view should be preferred to other opinions which date the work either as early as the 200 B.C. or as late as the 600 A.C.<sup>1</sup> Thus we see that the text of the *NS.* was already eight or nine centuries old at the time of Abhinavagupta. This length of time left an indelible mark of its ravages upon the work which was available even at the time of Abhinava in more recensions than one (Preface to the *NS.* in GOS, pp. 7-8; A. B. Keith, *op. cit.* p. 290). This commentator, as was very natural for a scholar in those days, followed the recension of the work that was available to him and probably did not know that there might be other recensions of the same. As a result of this, Abhinava's commentary loses much of its value. The modern scholarship which seeks to establish critically the text of the *NS.* from various recensions cannot be satisfied with Abhinava's rather onesided version.

Compared with Sāyana who commented on the Vedas, preserved more or less in a faultless fashion, Abhinava's position in commenting on the pseudo-Veda (= *NS.*) seems to have been unenviable. But even this luckier Sāyana has not been considered an infallible guide and authority in the Vedic interpretation. "We consequently hold," observes Prof. Rudolph Roth, "that the writings of Sāyana and other commentators must not be an authority to the exegete, but merely one of the means of which he has to avail himself in the accomplishment of

\* Some students of the *NS.* has recently given in this connection rather undue weight to the *Abhinavabhāratī*. (Vide Notes by Messrs. Mankad and Raghavan in *IHQ.*, vol. IX, pp. 973 f., 991 f. Hence the value of the work will be judged here.)

<sup>1</sup> See the present writer's paper on the date of the *NS.* published in the *Journal of the Department of Letters*, volume XXIV of the Calcutta University. In it the various data connected with the problem are discussed to show that the *NS.* existed about the beginning of the Christian era.

his task" (Introduction to the *St. Petersburg Lexicon*). This observation of Roth has been followed by most of the Vedic scholars and may be said to have led to excellent results. This being so, we do not know why Abhinava's commentary, defective as it is, should be considered our only guide for the interpretation of the *NŚ*, and why we should not make our own attempts, in pursuance of the critical method, in understanding the text.<sup>2</sup>

True it is that Abhinava's commentary in some rare cases may give us in spite of its defects important help in interpreting the text of the *NŚ*. but to be sure of such help we shall have to use a critical edition of this commentary which is still wanting. It is highly doubtful that such an edition of this work will be made in near future; for, the utter incorrect nature of the *Abhinavabhāratī* which exists in two different recensions will preclude such a possibility for a long time. The testimony of the learned editor of the *NŚ*, of the GOS, on this point should not be disregarded. The poor results which followed his attempt at editing the *Abhinavabhāratī* are mostly to be attributed to the wretched condition of his materials. The text of this work as established by him creates difficulty on the following points:

1. It gives *nāṭya maṇḍapa* in which half the area is occupied by the stage and the tiring room. This goes much against our practical sense.<sup>3</sup>

2. In commenting on *NŚ*. VI, 10 (GOS) the *Abhinavabhāratī* says that the *nāṭya* has five members (*Pañcāṅga*) and *abhinaya*s are three in number. But in the *NŚ*. itself we see that the *nāṭya* has been described as having six members (*ṣaḍaṅga*, VIII, 12 XXVII, Chowkhambā ed.) and this work recognizes four kinds of *abhinaya*s (VIII. 9 Chowkhambā ed.) and deals exhaustively with all of them in its body.

Besides this, according to the MS. of the *Abhinavabhāratī* in the possession of the Calcutta University we find that the author of this text was not very well informed about the Prākṛit grammars and gramma-

<sup>2</sup> For different views see *IHQ.*, IX, pp. 973, 991.

<sup>3</sup> See *IHQ.*, IX, pp. 975-976.

rians. For without making any comment on the Prākṛit section of the *NṢ.*; this author writes: विस्तारविजिज्ञासुः प्राकृतदीपिकादिकमवलोकयेत् । उदपलविरचितायां च सूत्रवृत्तौ पद्धतौ स्फुटं पूर्णं च सर्वमस्तीति तत्रादरः कार्यः । Here the omission of the names of Vararuci, Caṇḍa and Bhāmaha, and the mention of names otherwise quite unknown are very significant. If the passage quoted above will prove to be from the hands of Abhinavagupta then any faith in his omniscience will have to be given up.

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### The name of the Author of the Nyāyasāra

The authorship of the *Nyāyasāra*, a well-known work on Hindu logic written about the middle of the tenth century is attributed to Bhā-sarvajña. Dr. S. C. Vidyābhūṣaṇa, while noting its peculiarity and close resemblance to the names of Sarvajña Mitra and Sarvajña Deva who lived in Kashmir about 775 and 1025 A.D. respectively, does not, probably for want of sufficient data, decide against its being the actual name of the writer. Following him, Prof. Keith accepted the name as Bhā-sarvajña.

But if we turn to the commentary of Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra on *Kārikā* 203 of their own work, the *Nāṭyadarpaṇa*, written about 1150 A.D., it becomes clear that Sarvajña, and not Bhā-sarvajña, was the name of the author of the *Nyāyasāra*. After mentioning the forms of address suited to the Jain and Buddhist ascetics, they lay down the general rule that 'the followers of the *Pāśupata* and such other sects should be addressed by the names current in their time with *bhā* prefixed to the names, and so Sarvajña should be addressed as Bhā-Sarvajña.'<sup>1</sup> Thus, we see that *bhā* is prefixed, merely out of courtesy, to the names of the *Pāśupata* teachers as *śrī* is prefixed to

<sup>1</sup> मुनिर्निग्रन्थः शाक्यः सौगतः एतौ भदन्तेति । अपरः पाशुपतादिव्रती स्वसमय-  
प्रसिद्धनामनिर्वाच्यः । यथा पाशुपतस्य आपूर्व आसर्वज्ञ इत्यादिसम्भाषणम् । *Nāṭya-*  
*darpaṇa*, (G.O.S.), p. 212.